

FASTING FOR SPIRITUAL BREAKTHROUGH

LESSON 2

THE DISCIPLES FAST

Isaiah 58:6-8 KJV /s not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? [7] /s it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? [8] Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy rereward.

Matthew 17:18-21 KJV And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour. [19] Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out? [20] And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. [21] Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.

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I. INTRODUCTION -- NINE BIBLICAL FASTS THAT GOD CAN USE

When one looks at the reference from Isaiah concerning fasting, there are nine different, distinct fasts that when associated with other Scriptural stories, it gives us the ability to make the proper application in our own lives. We will briefly look at all nine of these before moving into the study of the Disciples Fast. (NOTE: I am using the book mentioned in the last session, *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough*, by Elmer Towns for some of the outline purposes and descriptions of each fast.)

The Disciples Fast

- **Purpose:** “To loose the bands of wickedness” -- Isaiah 58:6. This fast involves freeing our own lives and others from the grip of sin and the devil.
- **Key Verse:** “This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting” -- Matthew 17:21
- **Background:** Jesus challenged the disciples when they could not cast the devil out of an afflicted child. He instructed them that they could have accomplished this had a pattern of prayer and fasting been in their lives. Modern disciples are often content to live with the “besetting sins” that plague their lives and they could have power, victory, and even deliverance if they were willing to spend some time in prayer and fasting.

The Ezra Fast

- **Purpose:** “To undo the heavy burdens” -- Isaiah 58:6. This fast assists in solving problems and allowing the Holy Ghost to help us to lift burdens and overcoming barriers that hinder true progress in our lives and the Church.
- **Key Verse:** “So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was intreated of us.” - Ezra 8:23
- **Background:** Ezra, a priest, had the responsibility of rebuilding the Temple and restoring the Law of Moses. During this time, the enemies of Israel worked to oppose the progress of the renewal and restoration. Ezra fasted and prayed for the direction of God and He heard.

The Samuel Fast

- **Purpose:** “To let the oppressed go free” -- Isaiah 58:6. This fast is one that is directed toward revival and harvest. It’s purpose is to help us to identify people who are enslaved with sin and that we may provide the spiritual direction to help them to be brought out of the darkness and into the light.
- **Key Verse:** “And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the LORD, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the LORD.” 1 Samuel 7:6.
- **Background:** Samuel was the prime mover behind this fast. The Israelites were celebrating the return of the Ark from it’s captivity by the Philistines. The fast was to stimulate within them a hunger for change and to never allow the Ark to be captured again. One must continue the prayer and fasting even after revival has come to the Church.

The Elijah Fast

- **Purpose:** “To break every yoke” -- Isaiah 58:6. This fast is directed toward conquering the mental and emotional anxieties and stresses that can sometimes control our thinking, our perception, and our outlook on life.
- **Key Verses:** “But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.” -- 1 Kings 19:4
- “And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God.” -- 1 Kings 19:8
- **Background:** Although Scripture does not formally call this a “fast,” Elijah did refrain from food when he was fleeing from Jezebel. Because of this time of “fasting under duress,” God did send an angel to minister to Elijah in the wilderness.

The Widow’s Fast

- **Purpose:** “To deal thy bread to the hungry” -- Isaiah 58:7.
- **Key Verse:** “And the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah.” 1 Kings 17:16
- **Background:** Elijah found a widow in the middle of the famine and she and her son were preparing to die. His presence and her obedience helped to relieve her hunger. Our investment into prayer and fasting can help relieve the hunger in the lives of many of those around us.

The Saint Paul Fast

- **Purpose:** “Then shall thy light break forth as the morning” -- Isaiah 58:8. This fast is to help us to make crucial decisions by bring a clearer perspective to the situation.
- **Key Verse:** “And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.” Acts 9:9
- **Background:** Saul of Tarsus, was struck blind by the Lord on his way to Damascus. After this injury, he went for three days without food or drink and then Ananias came and prayed for Paul and his vision was restored. Not only was his natural vision restored the will of God was laid out for his life to follow.

The Daniel Fast

- **Purpose:** “Thine health shall spring forth” -- Isaiah 58:8. This fast is specifically set aside for gaining a healthier life or for healing.
- **Key Verse:** “But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank:” Daniel 1:8.
- **Background:** Daniel along with three of his Hebrew captives did not want to eat the unhealthy food of the king. Because God guided their efforts, they appeared more healthy than the others in the end.

The John the Baptist Fast

- **Purpose:** “Thy righteousness shall go before thee” -- Isaiah 58:8. This fast is designed in such a manner to bring power to the testimony of Jesus Christ in our lives. Because of this our lives can become a true witness and we may influence others for the cause of Christ.
- **Key Verse:** “He shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink.” Luke 1:15
- **Background:** Because of John the Baptist’s position in the Kingdom of God, he took the Nazarite vow and he was placed in a lifestyle that caused him to “fast” from wine and strong drink. Because of his lifestyle, he was set apart for a special mission for God.

The Esther Fast

- **Purpose:** “The glory of the Lord will be our reward” -- Isaiah 58:8. This fast is designated to protect us from the attack of the devil.
- **Key Verses:** “Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.” Esther 4:16
- “And it was so, when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, that she obtained favour in his sight: and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the sceptre.” Esther 5:2.
- **Background:** Queen Esther, was a Jewess in a very pagan court, who risked her life to save her people from threatened destruction by Ahasuerus (Xerxes) the king of Persia. Prior to her approach of him in the court, Esther, her attendants and her cousin Mordecai all fasted to appeal to God for His divine intervention.

II. THE DISCIPLES FAST

The Disciples Fast is to “loose the bands of wickedness” (Isaiah 58:6). This fast has to do with overcoming spiritual strongholds in our lives that will release one from the bondage of sin. Hebrews 12:1 encourages us to lay aside every weight and the sin that besets us. Another word that could be placed in this setting could be: harass; surround; entangle; or trouble. The writer is encouraging us to flee from these things. Besetting sins are those actions or attitudes that have managed to entangle itself into the mentality of one’s spirit. It is not because you have decided to continue involvement with this action or that you have chosen to shake your hand in the face of God, it is simply that you cannot shake free of this encumbrance.

That is where understanding that fasting is crucial to overcoming the strongholds in life. Our own quest for personal holiness can be greatly assisted by the act of fasting. Throughout Scripture we are commanded to live a life of holiness which is a separation from the world and a separation to God.

When one gives in to the temptations of the devil, it is because he believes the lies that the devil brings forth. Foremost, we must remember the Jesus identified Satan as a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44). So when we succumb to the sin, we have bought a lie. The lies generally fall into one of three categories.

- I tried before, and cannot break this habit/stronghold (I am a slave).
- I do not want to do this, but I cannot help it (I am a victim).
- I need an answer, but do not know where to find it (I am lost).

At this point, one of two things will occur. First, the individual will simply give up the fight and remain in this condition for the rest of their life or the individual will determine that the power of God has the ability to break the “bonds of wickedness” (Isaiah 58:6). The lie of the devil will convince you that you have no power over sin but this simply is not true.

This gives rise to two questions to ask:

- How can we break external bondages in our lives?
- How can we regain control of our lives?

The answer: When you take control of your physical appetite, you develop strength to take control of your emotional appetite. When you take control of what you eat, you determine that you will take control of your life for the very purpose of God. This fast will strengthen you to stand against a force that has enslaved your spiritual appetite. What masters us has become our God. Paul was very clear about this when he wrote about those whom have their “bellies” as their gods (Philippians 3:19).

A. The Demon Possessed Boy -- Matthew 17:14-21

The father of this boy brought him to the disciples because he did not understand the problem in his son’s life (Matthew 17:15). The father actually believed that his son was sick and did not understand that there were other forces at play. Jesus knew exactly that a demon had entered this child and had taken control of his life.

Whenever the father brought the boy to the disciples they could not bring relief to him. The Lord rebuked them because of their unbelief and then issued the challenge of much prayer and fasting. The choice to fast (mixed with prayer) will pay great dividends toward spiritual strength.

Several things occur when we involve ourselves in the Disciples Fast:

- **You make a life-freeing choice to be delivered.**

There was a man who came to Jesus once (John 5:6) who needed healing. He was confronted with a question, “Do you want to be made whole?” Jesus knew the need and knew that the man wanted healing, however, for the man to speak his need to the Lord confirmed his own desire for healing.

The underlying principle here is that God wants to work with our desire. Often people go to altars and weep, repent, etc. expecting God to totally take away their struggles. They expect some great lightning bolt in the Spirit to “fix” them and instantly take away the appetites within that are creating their problems.

Deliverance occurs in the Spirit but has to be demonstrated in the flesh (John 11:14-46)! Deliverance is a spiritual empowerment that not only empowers the spirit of a man but also the flesh of a man (Romans 8:10-11; 1 John 4:4; Ephesians 2:2-10)! Deliverance helps us to look within to accomplish things without!

- **You confess a previous lack of faith.**

Before you can be strong, you must understand where the weak areas are. Whatever you may be personally struggling with can be overcome when we place our trust in the Lord. The disciples were confronted with the words of the Lord, “Because of your unbelief” (Matthew 17:20) as to their lack of success. It is a statement of faith when we invest ourselves in fasting and prayer because we are recognizing what we are unable to do. Faith is releasing our lives to the strategy of God and then submitting to it.

- **You specifically state your need prior to the time of fasting.**

The Disciple’s Fast involves stating exactly what you are expecting to occur in this time of fasting. When you are fasting to break certain strongholds in your life, you must write out the specific stronghold you want to break. Notice what happens when you start writing:

- You strengthen your will by stating what you want.
- You focus your energies on the problem.
- You build up anticipation to break the problem.
- You build up your faith in God to expect an answer.

By focusing your fast on a stronghold (lying, lust, laziness, doubt, discouragement, discontentment, covetousness, envy, anger, inconsistency, resentment, impulsiveness, judgment, apathy, harshness, pride, self-indulgence, hypocrisy, etc.), you bring a purpose to your fasting. You are allowing the spiritual discipline to begin to work on the flesh through its physical appetites.

- **You fast repeatedly until you get a breakthrough.**

Jesus indicated that “this kind” (v. 21) will require fasting and prayer. The verb tense in the Greek language is such that one understands this to be a continuous action. Jesus meant for all disciples, both past and present, to fast continually for power over besetting sins. This may involve fasting for a longer time or more often (once a week for several weeks) than we might have expected.

Fasting for an answer is similar to prayer. Sometimes it just takes a single session in prayer. There are other times that we are continually praying for an answer and it takes time before we gain an answer. However, that does not mean we quit praying, we simply continue our prayers. The same is true with fasting. If the desired outcome is not immediate, we must continue to fast until we see the stronghold torn down.

The answer very well could come immediately from God, however, the longer that we fast, the more we obey God. The longer that we abstain from food, the more determined that we become. After a time, our faith grows to trust God for greater miracles in our lives.

B. The Steps Toward Deliverance

Often we encounter great frustration when we cannot shake free of the strongholds. Those who struggle with a sin that grips or a habit that continually condemns can find the

Disciples Fast to be very productive. I might also add that I have personally witnessed people who were immediately delivered from cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, etc. at an altar. This is always a great time of victory when such things occur. On the other hand, I have witnessed people who were delivered and at a later point in their lives (3-6 months) picked up those same things again and their struggle was monumental in trying to overcome these things. It took no small amount of prayer and fasting and sadly few of these ever made it back.

We must be very careful in the society that we live in because the seeds of the strongholds are being planted daily within our hearts. The seeds send their roots deep into our subconscious minds and they influence our emotions and our physical actions. For that reason, we note that prayer and fasting are closely linked throughout scores of Scriptures.

For deliverance to occur through fasting and prayer, the following steps are necessary in breaking spiritual bondage:

1. Renounce Counterfeit Control

This step requires for us to *think* or the biblical concept would call it “to discern.” We must discern what is good for us spiritually and what is detrimental to us. We must discern the Kingdom of God versus the control of the devil.

2 Corinthians 11:3 KJV But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

2 Corinthians 11:3 The Message And now I’m afraid that exactly as the Snake seduced Eve with his smooth patter, you are being lured away from the simple purity of your love for Christ.

2 Corinthians 11:3 NASB But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

Deception abounds in our culture. We are constantly bombarded by society. If you grew up in an ungodly home, your thinking has to be transformed because much of what was learned there was quite opposite of Scriptural principles. Take into consideration also the godless influence of the mass media in books, music, movies, and other forms of media and one immediately realizes that the work of the serpent is alive and well. Therefore, we must understand that there is a “counterfeit” that is attempting to control our minds and actions.

Jesus contrasted His ministry in John 10 (vv. 1-18) and specifically stated that His actions were to add life and fullness and hope to those in need. However, the work of the devil was to “steal, kill, and destroy.” To experience this abundant life that Jesus promised, we have to understand the outside influences and their harm to us spiritually.

Look at your life overall and ask God for a sense of spiritual and biblical discernment so that you can take effective inventory and renounce the control of the “counterfeit.” Embrace what is real and what is vibrant so that you can have spiritual victory.

2. Acknowledge Self-Deception

James told us very clearly about the man who is “double-minded.” He said that he is unstable in all of his ways (James 1:8). This is where much self-deception takes place. From the

previous step, one notes that there is an external deception that applies with our lives but just as there is an external source of deception there comes with that an internal source of deception.

The Disciple's Fast will help us to breakdown rationalizations that hinders our spiritual progress. Such rationalizations as:

- God does not demand such devotion in my life. . . . Such a call to surrender is only meant for church leaders and biblical elders.
- I am happy where I am spiritually and do not see a need to go any further in my walk with God.
- This is just the way that I am. . . . My father (mother, brother, sister, etc.) was like this and I am just like them and cannot change.
- Times have changed and there is no need to press for fasting and prayer. . . . We live in the age of grace and that is sufficient enough (to an extent this is true, but for real spiritual power have it's proper place in our lives, we have to follow the pattern of the Apostles.)

We deceive ourselves in the following ways:

James 1:22 KJV But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

We deceive ourselves when we hear the Word purely for entertainment purposes. Hearing but not doing.

Galatians 6:3 KJV For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.

We deceive ourselves by having over-inflated view of our own spiritual resources and relationship.

1 Corinthians 3:18 KJV Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.

We are deceived by evaluating our wisdom by the standard of the age rather than the wisdom of God.

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 KJV [9] Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, [10] Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

We deceive ourselves when we think that there are no consequences for our sin.

As long as we are content with self-deception, we shall paddle in the shallows of God's blessing and purpose and never really accomplish anything for the Kingdom of God. The more that we are deceived by self, the more prone we are in the long run to be lost. Honesty with God and ourselves will allow the truth of God's Word to free us from deception.

3. Forgive to Overcome Bitterness

The third step to breaking the “bands of wickedness” through fasting occurs when we are willing to forgive someone to overcome bitterness and gain freedom.

2 Corinthians 2:10-11 KJV [10] To whom ye forgive any thing, I *forgive* also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave *it*, for your sakes *forgave I it* in the person of Christ; **[11]** Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.

I realize that perhaps you thought that fasting for a great spiritual breakthrough involved such other great things like crusades, conferences, and events. The fact of the matter is that often great revival begins with a great searching within. It very well could be that great revival and spiritual power is being held back in your life because of a grudge or offense that you have been nursing for years.

Forgiveness is a choice and because God requires us to forgive others. Our natural tendency is to seek after revenge because of our own suffering. When we do not let others “off the hook” it means that they still have hooks in us. That places us in bondage to them. *If we do not forgive them for their sakes, we should forgive them for our own sakes.*

Forgiveness is not merely a conflict between yourself and the offender, but a matter between you and God. When you forgive, you choose to live with the consequences of the wrongs committed against you. If you do not forgive, you will live with bitter consequences anyway.

4. Submit to God’s Authority

The fourth step to breakthrough in the Disciple’s Fast involves overcoming rebellion by submitting to the authority of God and those He has placed over you. Jesus compared being under authority to a manifestation of great faith (Matthew 8:8-10).

God has placed all men under authority:

- Civil Government -- Romans 13:1-7
- Church Leadership -- Hebrews 13:17
- Parents -- Ephesians 6:1-3
- Husbands -- 1 Peter 3:1-4
- Employers -- 1 Peter 2:13-23
- God -- Daniel 9:5-9

Dealing with a rebellious spirit or attitude and placing ourselves under authority is another step toward breaking bondage in our lives. It is an important part of the Disciple’s Fast because it is evidence of our submission to God Himself.

5. Disown Sinful Influences

The final step toward spiritual freedom involves disowning sinful influences that come from friends and acquaintances. Generally, the application of this principle comes about because we *must* separate ourselves from any negative spiritual influence no matter whether it is a person,

activity, or thing. This may appear easier said than done. However, a few steps can help you through this process. You must recognize that you belong to God (2 Corinthians 4:14; Galatians 5:24). Secondly, you must use this ownership of God to overcome the devil (1 Corinthians 6:20; 1 John 1:7).

III. CONCLUSION

Fasting is a private vow made to God and therefore these issues must be dealt with privately. Public anointing can go no higher than private devotion.

The whole purpose of the Disciple's Fast is to gain freedom from a besetting sin or habit that is constantly pulling you away from the purpose that God has for your life.